

Dear Secretary of State,

25th September 2020

I write to you in my capacity as Chairman of the Board of AIM, the Activities Industry Mutual, which provides liability and property cover to over 750 Members who operate a wide variety of provision in the outdoor sector: school outdoor education centres; residential centres; adventure programmes; climbing walls; coastal and inland watersports venues; mountain training centres; coaching and leadership organisations.

Our Members, together with the entire outdoor sector have been largely shut down by the pandemic, and the prospects currently for the future of the entire sector is looking very bleak indeed. Many operators will not survive and opportunities for most young people to learn in the outdoors could be eliminated.

We ask you, indeed plead with you, to consider how you can save outdoor provision and the outdoor sector.

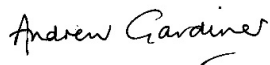
Firstly I do thank you and the Department of Education for the supportive dialogue you have had with our sector so far. It is very much appreciated, especially at a time when so many providers face an uncertain future.

However, there are five main issues I need to stress:


1. **Schools need to know when residential school visits can resume** subject to events. Otherwise without the necessary advanced planning provision, 2021 capacity will be lost;
2. The country is faced with a **permanent loss of expertise** and capacity in the outdoor sector;
3. **Insurance protection** to allow investment commitment for provision in 2021;
4. **Youth employment** has been badly hit by the closure of this sector. Most of the employment and training in the outdoors, mainly for the young, will be impossible to recover;
5. **The importance of outdoor educational activities** to counter balance on line virtual experience.

The outdoor sector is well organised and well represented by coordinating bodies, such as the IOL, BAPA, AHOEC, the English Outdoor Council and others, and we are all ready to play our part to support efforts you can make to reopen outdoor education. I have set out overleaf our concerns in more detail.

With serious alarm



Andrew Gardiner
Chairman AIM



Sophia Reed
Mutual Manager for AIM

Background information

The AIM board has investigated the current situation on behalf of our Members, all of whom are worried that they cannot plan for the future, and may not have a future.

I understand that a recommendation has been made to you by your team. There is as you know a growing urgency for a decision to be made on residential school visits to enable delivery in Spring 2021 or better still this autumn. The current loss of opportunity for children and young people to benefit from outdoor residential is contrary to the evidence of a wealth of research. The Education Endowment Foundation, the provider of teacher guidance recommended by the Department of Education (DfE), points out that social emotional learning is as important as and underpins academic achievement.

Unfortunately, the current lack of indication of when DfE guidance will change regarding school residential visits, means that all providers of these services are unable to plan; they are turning to worse case scenarios to protect themselves; or leaving the sector. If the position does not change before Easter 2021, we at least a 1/3 of capacity in the sector being lost for at least the medium term. This of course means that as well as this year's schools' visits next year's will also be similarly affected.

I cannot emphasise enough the irreparable damage that the permanent loss of capacity and expertise will cause, to children, learning, schools and providers and the hundreds of thousands of young people employed seasonally and permanently. This has already started, and will accelerate. My own company employed over 200 young seasonal staff last year. This year none. Head office reduced from 45 to 10.

There will be an increase in personalised virtual learning as a direct result of the pandemic, so children will need more social and physical learning experiences to balance this and achieve a rounded education. Outdoor learning as delivered by our sector is relatively cheap compared with teacher led learning. First hand

experiential learning and social experience are most effectively delivered in the outdoors.

I am personally aware that many of our AIM Members have resumed some activities, with Covid secure guidelines being followed and the social distancing, group size restrictions, hygiene and equipment sanitisation all being adhered to. They have experienced an overwhelming desire by the public and schools to engage in outdoor active physical activities BUT RESIDENTIALS REMAIN RESTRICTED AND THEREFORE ARE NOT POSSIBLE. I have first hand knowledge that many of our AIM Members, as well as a number of organisations in the sector have delivered a range of programmes without any major COVID-19 related incidents, which provides reassuring evidence that these activities can be carried out safely. Reinstating school residential visits is vital and I would strongly urge you to ensure that they are reinstated now.

A M Gardiner, Chairman, The Activities Industry Mutual and Chairman of Acorn Adventure

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